United Nations E/C.16/2018/2

Economic and Social Council

Distr.: General
14 February 2018

Original: English

Committee of Experts on Public Administration
Seventeenth session
23–27 April 2018
Item 3 (a) of the provisional agenda*
Readying institutions and policies for implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: promoting policy and institutional coherence in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals to be reviewed in depth by the 2018 high-level political forum on sustainable development and the other Goals

Promoting policy and institutional coherence for the Sustainable Development Goals

Note by the Secretariat

The Secretariat has the honour to transmit to the Committee of Experts on Public Administration the paper prepared by Committee member Louis Meuleman, in consultation with Cristina Duarte, Geraldine Fraser-Moleketi, Bridget Katsriku, Ma Hezu and Joan Mendez.

* E/C.16/2018/1.

18-01069 (E) 050318

Please recycle

Promoting policy and institutional coherence for the Sustainable Development Goals

Summary

An important condition for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 will be the development of more coherent policies, policy implementation and administrative and institutional frameworks. However, incoherence linked to political and administrative fragmentation and silo-thinking is still prominent and results in huge environmental, social and economic costs.

The present paper contains an analysis of how Governments could implement the call in Sustainable Development Goal 17 to improve policy and institutional coherence. It identifies interventions to improve coherence and presents some good practice examples of overcoming policy contradictions and improving political steering and administrative quality across policy sectors and across different levels of government.

Coherence is characterized by logic and consistency and has different meanings in different contexts. The implementation of common goals requires differentiation with respect to policies, governance and administrative mechanisms across countries and across government levels. Even if it seems a paradox, coherence and differentiated practice need to go hand in hand: the Sustainable Development Goals are about unity and diversity. The 2030 Agenda and its Goals provide an opportunity and a responsibility to improve the capacity of political, social, economic and administrative systems. This is a joint challenge of less-developed and more-developed nations. All countries are facing very similar challenges with regard to policy and institutional coherence for the Sustainable Development Goals, but many have already found solutions to some of the problems. Mechanisms supporting the structured exchange of good practices and valuable lessons learned between countries should be put in place without delay.

The present paper contains 10 concrete recommendations, which should enable, guide and coach efforts to achieve better coherence. The implementation of the recommendations will require sponsors, early adopters and supporters.

Three of the recommendations emphasize principles for the promotion of coherence: (1) the promotion of policy coherence should be in synergy with the promotion of institutional coherence; (2) measures for the promotion of coherence should be adapted to the context in which they will be implemented; and (3) the private sector, civil society and the academic world should be closely involved in the promotion of coherence.

Four of the recommendations suggest concrete actions: (4) the structured improvement of policy and institutional coherence requires national work programmes; (5) a combination of intervention types should be used to promote coherence; (6) complementary tools to promote coherence can be combined; and (7) public sector reforms should be redirected to deliver better on coherent implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals.

Three recommendations stress specific actions on learning: (8) there is a need for a global peer-to-peer learning mechanism for the promotion of coherence; (9) a global network of national coherence promotion coordinators should be established; and (10) national public administration schools should integrate the promotion of coherence for the Sustainable Development Goals in their curricula.

I. An urgent call to promote policy and institutional coherence for the Sustainable Development goals

1. The present paper is intended to offer concrete recommendations to promote policy and institutional coherence for the Sustainable Development Goals based on an analysis of the successes and failures of existing policy and institutional coherence in supporting the implementation of the globally endorsed Goals. The recommendations presented in the paper are intended to be action-oriented and operational.

2. In the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the integrated, indivisible and universal nature of the Sustainable Development Goals is stressed. It is essential to build synergies across all dimensions of sustainable development for the effective implementation of the Goals. There is therefore a need for integrated policies that address the relationships among the economic, social and environmental dimensions of sustainable development and among different sectors. In 2017, the high-level political forum on sustainable development, as the main platform for reviewing implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, acknowledged that many countries had already established mechanisms to improve coordination for better implementation of the Goals. Examples include cross-sectoral government working groups, multi-stakeholder committees and high-level coordinators, and some countries are striving for a broader whole-of-government approach.

3. However, many countries continue to grapple with the challenge of developing and implementing policies that integrate the three dimensions of sustainable development and build on the synergies between the various goals and targets. In order address this challenge, it is important to rethink the way institutions are organized and work and the way they make, deliver and review policies. Institutions and institutional infrastructure are crucial for promoting sustainable development.

4. Another precondition for improving policy and institutional coherence for the Sustainable Development Goals is effective leadership with the vision and ownership to build the necessary institutions and policies for domestic resource mobilization, accountability and transparency. Such leadership cannot be outsourced to external experts; it must be in-house capacity. Leadership is needed at the highest level of government and at all levels of public administration.

5. The Economic and Social Council has invited the Committee of Experts on Public Administration to place the 2030 Agenda at the centre of its work (see Council resolution 2016/26, para. 2), thus giving the Committee, as the only expert body in the United Nations dedicated to governance and public administration issues, a critical mandate to provide advice and programmatic guidance on the various institutional aspects of enhancing policy coherence and promoting integrated approaches to sustainable development. Since its first session, in 2002, the Committee has provided advice about promoting administration-wide strategies, participation and partnerships and about systemic approaches to disaster risk management, the complexity of governance, integrated policymaking, strengthening administrative capacity, national institutional arrangements and strategies, and policy coherence within specific policy domains. In 2017, the Committee concluded that practical tools were needed to assist policymakers in implementing the Sustainable Development Goals.

6. The synthesis reports of the voluntary national reviews at the high-level political forum[1] and other recent publications have provided an analysis of the successes and failures with respect to policy and institutional coherence in many countries. However, notwithstanding the positive intentions and promising measures, sustainability governance by the States Members of the United Nations is still dominated by centralism and neglect of the complexity and the difficulty of the challenges, together with overly simplified approaches to problems within classical hierarchical governance structures (see E/C.16/2017/5). Hierarchical thinking promotes specialization, which results in fragmentation and silo-thinking. In addition, the cultural dimension of governance, including its coherence challenges, is often neglected.[2]

7. The lack of policy coherence can be traced back to governance failures, such as the lack of dedicated incentives and arrangements to support working across policy sectors and among levels of government. The absence of adequate horizontal and vertical coordination is a serious problem.

8. In addition to a general analysis, the present paper provides a specific analysis of coherence issues concerning the Sustainable Development Goals that will be reviewed in depth at the meeting of the high-level political forum in 2018, namely Goals 6, 7, 11, 12 and 15, on water and sanitation, energy, cities and human settlements, consumption and production patterns, and life on land, respectively, as well as Goal 17.

II. Defining policy and institutional coherence

9. Targets 13 to 15 of Sustainable Development Goal 17 call for addressing the systemic challenges of policy and institutional coherence for sustainable development. Although the terms "coherence" and "integration" are often used as synonyms, there is a small but significant difference between them which is relevant in the context of the present paper. Policy integration emphasizes taking the objectives of other policy sectors into account (e.g., environmental integration in energy policy) or even merging objectives. The promotion of policy coherence implies ensuring logic and consistency among policies and preventing them from undermining each other. This requires having a kind of coherence "watchdog" function in place when new policies are designed and when policies are being implemented.

10. Policy and institutional coherence suggests logic and consistency, but the term is subjective and culturally coloured, and no objective measure for coherence exists. Accordingly, the term "coherence" should always be used in context. On the other hand, the development of logical and consistent policies and functioning institutions is widely recognized as necessary.

11. Political and organizational cultures can hamper coherence, horizontally within or between government departments and vertically between levels of administration. There are often large cultural differences between spending departments, such as those dealing with infrastructure, and regulatory departments, such as departments of justice, the environment or finance. Internationally, this happens between

[1] United Nations, Synthesis of voluntary national reviews. Available from https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org.

[2] Louis Meuleman, "Cultural diversity and sustainability metagovernance", in *Transgovernance: Advancing Sustainability Governance*, Louis Meuleman, ed. (Heidelberg, Germany, New York, United States of America, Dordrecht and Amsterdam, Netherlands, Springer, 2013)

organizations with similar tasks but different national cultural backgrounds. For example, the coherence of energy policies across national borders can be difficult because in some countries such policies are largely privatized, whereas in others they are not.

12. Policy coherence thus entails achieving consistency between different policies within and across sectors and at different levels of government. Policy coherence for sustainable development, and in particular for the Sustainable Development Goals, builds on the long experience of policy coherence for development in the field of development cooperation, which aims at achieving consistency between foreign aid and other, sometimes contradictory, development-related policy areas, such as agriculture, trade, investment, technology and migration.[3] The objective of both policy coherence for development and policy coherence for sustainable development is to ensure that policy instruments are aligned to support the same objectives. However, many important global agreements lack this requisite coherence during their implementation, which makes them underperform in terms of the desired impact and scale of their outcomes. Moreover, political leaders are not usually held accountable for policy coherence.

13. Incoherence among policies has a tremendous impact on the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The tackling of climate change (Goal 13) is hampered by the still-existing massive subsidies of fossil fuels, although Goal 7 promotes affordable and clean energy. Hydropower is renewable energy, under the terms of Goal 7, but undermines biodiversity and the protection of nature on land (Goal 15). The shift towards renewable energy may hamper the priority given by some countries to ensuring that people have access to electricity. Transport policies allow the pollution of cities, which is inconsistent with Goal 3, on good health and well-being, and Goal 11, on sustainable cities.

14. Another example of this is the incoherence between sustainable and inclusive economic development, as promoted in Goal 8, and the fact that national economic policies are usually designed based on the growth of gross domestic product (GDP). Africa's high economic growth over the last 15 to 20 years has been considered good news. However, this growth has not ended the vicious cycle of poverty or ensured inclusive prosperity. Focusing economic growth (Goal 8) on GDP parameters contradicts, among others, Goals 1 (the eradication of poverty) and 10 (reduction of inequalities). Italy is the first country in Europe to adopt a set of development indicators that complement the Sustainable Development Goals and focus on equitable and sustainable well-being, thus implementing target 17.19. These indicators are now being used to monitor and validate government budgetary policies.

15. Institutional coherence can be defined as normative integration of institutional arrangements. It is a means to achieve policy coherence, which is a means to achieve better policy outcomes. The Committee concluded in 2015 that institutional constraints to policy coherence typically include overly hierarchical structures, the lack of a common strategic policy direction and sectoral self-interest. These structural challenges can be compounded by inadequate mechanisms for allocating resources for cross-cutting issues and ensuring shared accountability for shared responsibilities (see E/2015/44-E/C.16/2015/7, para. 55). There are also often tensions between national policy developers and local policy implementers. These challenges exist, to

[3] David O'Connor, James Mackie, Daphne Van Esveld, Hoseok Kim, Imme Scholz and Nina Weitz, "Universality, integration, and policy coherence for sustainable development: early SDG implementation in selected OECD countries", World Resources Institute working paper (Washington, D.C., World Resources Institute, 2016).

differing degrees, even in countries where there are clear regulatory mechanisms for the budget across the different levels of government.

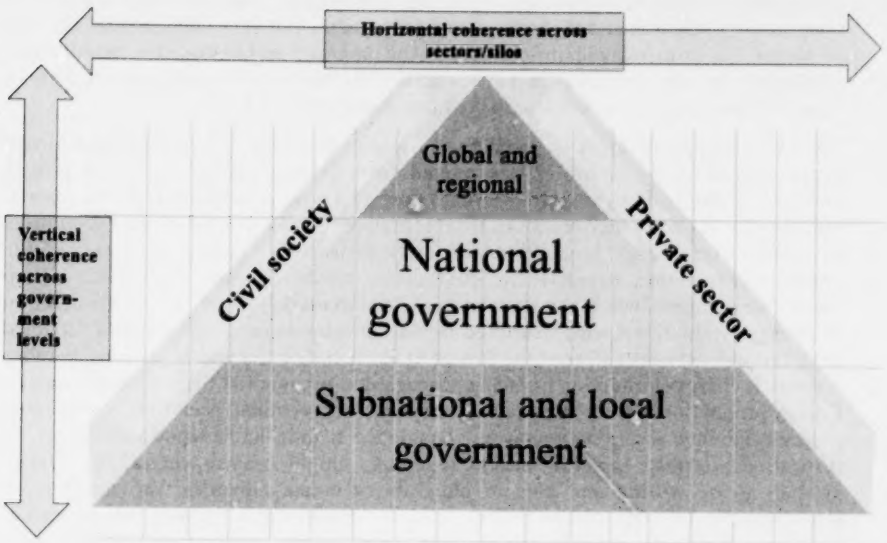
16. Flaws in institutional coherence are responsible for governance failures, including lack of policy coherence, fragmentation of organizations responsible for complex policy challenges, and competition and undermining actions by different administrative organizations. Appropriate institutional coherence requires formal or informal arrangements. In order to prevent policies from undermining each other, leadership is required to establish appropriate reporting lines and guidance on competition for the budget. Good policy coherence may still emerge, even when institutional conditions are not supportive, but the benefits may not last long when different institutions (e.g., sectoral ministries) do not cooperate. This can be even more problematic when there are different political parties in government at the local, regional and national/federal levels and institutions are being used for political purposes.

17. The policy and institutional dimensions of coherence are aspects of sustainability governance and are highly interrelated. To some extent, they are interdependent. Some degree of institutional coherence is a precondition for policy coherence. Policy officers from transport and environment ministries should be stimulated to work together on traffic congestion, for example. However, policy coherence may also be needed to promote institutional coherence. When ministers from different policy fields agree on a common policy approach, the administrative organization must facilitate its implementation institutionally. One of the inherent problems is that both policies and institutions tend to lose effectiveness over time. The logic they are based on (policy theories or institutional logic) may not apply anymore to changed circumstances after 10 or 20 years. For example, building dikes is a good option to protect against water, unless water levels continue to rise, in which case policy theory should change to work with, instead of against, water, creating "room for the rivers" (Netherlands). An institutional logic that produces clearly defined silos — which are beneficial for accountability — may need to change to facilitate cross-sectoral programmes. The promotion of coherence should therefore be a dynamic challenge. Similarly, coherence issues take different forms during the policy cycle. A coherent national policy and institutional framework to address climate change may face incoherence during implementation at the subnational level; conversely, local initiatives may be hampered by lack of coordination between national ministries and agencies.

18. In order to improve policy effectiveness, institutional coherence may require improvement, for example, by creating interdepartmental project or programme teams or a matrix type of organization and/or using a cluster approach. Quite often, the merging of departments is considered a quick-fix to promote coherence. It is clear that climate and energy policies should be integrated as much as possible and, in several countries, this has resulted in the merging of those themes under one ministry. However, it is not at all clear if, and under which conditions, such a merger leads to better handling of the nexus of climate and energy, and if this approach is appropriate for countries in which there is a scarcity of energy.

19. Experience shows that efforts to promote policy and institutional coherence should focus on: (a) horizontal challenges across sectors, by, among other things, overcoming silo-thinking; (b) vertical challenges across levels of administration; and (c) involving civil society and the private sector in all stages, from policy design to implementation and evaluation (see fig.).

Policy and institutional coherence for the Sustainable Development Goals, horizontal, vertical and inclusive



20. In order to address the lack of policy and institutional coherence, strategic approaches and tools that can cover both challenges simultaneously are needed. In the present paper, nine approaches or intervention types are suggested as potentially helpful, as they have proven to be useful in practice: coordination; integration; alignment; multilevel governance; compatibility; reconciliation; reform; capacity-building; and empowerment. Those approaches are discussed in section IV below. In section III, the specific coherence needs of the Sustainable Development Goals to be discussed in depth at the 2018 meeting of the high-level political forum for sustainable development are reviewed briefly.

III. Coherence as a governance challenge for the Sustainable Development Goals: examples from five of the Goals

Goal 6: clean water and sanitation

21. Goal 6 has two governance targets, 6.a, on international cooperation and capacity-building support to developing countries in water- and sanitation-related programmes, and 6.b, on strengthening the participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management. One of the specific challenges in this area, which is traditionally dominated by technical discourse, is that institutional dimensions of water management and decision-making do not effectively take into account the needs of poor households. The result has been that poor households are not connected by water suppliers or have not applied for a connection. This is an example of the need for more vertical policy and institutional coherence, as well as the need to encourage informal action by non-governmental actors to support poor households.

Goal 7: affordable and clean energy

22. Energy is essential for development and requires bold thinking from both the governance and the access perspectives. The aim of target 7.a is to enhance access to clean energy research and technology and promote the relevant investments. The aim of target 7.b is to expand infrastructure and upgrade technology for modern and sustainable energy services, in particular for the least developed countries, small island developing States and landlocked developing countries.

23. With respect to target 7.1, on universal access to energy, it is relevant that energy production in many countries has moved from (local) public service to private enterprises, followed by a scaling-up into powerful power companies that are almost monopolies. As a counter-reaction, local initiatives have emerged in many countries to decentralize energy production and make renewable energy again part of the commons. In some countries, a governance transition has taken place, from hierarchical governance at the state or local level to market governance (privatization of energy production), which resulted in market failures, and then back to the local level through networks steered and owned by local authorities and/or citizens. In other countries, energy production has been privatized to monopolist firms from the outset. Energy production and consumption are largely cross-national; accordingly, increased policy coherence across nations would enable the scaling-up of renewable energy. In institutional terms, universal access to energy might require centralized energy systems to be willing and able to integrate or create alliances with small local initiatives. Sustainable energy programmes in Croatia and Mongolia, where market (private), network (collaborative) and hierarchical (centralized) governance mechanisms were combined, have been identified as successful. In a case of successful regulatory efforts, Ghana managed to reduce substantially the electricity consumption from refrigerators in homes without air-conditioners, which accounted for about 70 per cent of electricity consumption and caused power shortages.

24. The situation described above also applies to target 7.b, on expanding energy infrastructure and upgrading energy technology. In many cases, energy infrastructure policy is strongly influenced by market forces and financial and geopolitical priorities. The achievement of Goal 7 in the full spirit of the 2030 Agenda might require a stronger regulatory influence from Governments as well as from bottom-up initiatives (leaving no one behind). In addition, policy and institutional coherence debates should be linked to existing global initiatives on energy, such as Sustainable Energy for All and the Global Covenant of Mayors for Climate and Energy.

Goal 11: sustainable cities and communities

25. Goal 11 has three governance targets: 11.a, on improving national and regional development planning to link urban and non-urban areas; 11.b, on promoting integrated policies and plans towards inclusion, resource efficiency, mitigation of and adaptation to climate change and resilience to disasters, and developing and implementing holistic disaster risk management; and 11.c, on supporting least developed countries, including through financial and technical assistance, in building sustainable and resilient buildings utilizing local materials.

26. Cities are hotspots of innovation and wealth, but also of extreme poverty. In Africa, Asia and Latin America there are rapidly growing cities in which sustainability is not yet a high priority. On the positive side, many cities have become leaders in addressing climate change, other environmental issues and social challenges. One of the big challenges is vertical coherence between national and local policies and institutional arrangements and mandates. A general complaint from big cities that are leaders in sustainable development is that that their national Governments are blocking progress, among other things because of their bureaucracy.

27. The general pull towards cities has weakened the sustainability of rural areas and created large peri-urban areas. The relationship between urban, peri-urban and rural areas is a challenge to horizontal coherence. An example of good practice is Cape Town, South Africa, where the mayor organizes monthly meetings with underresourced municipalities in the peri-urban areas, with the aim of enabling those municipalities to benefit from the purchasing power of the larger metropolitan area by acquiring needed equipment and services at lower prices. Other forms of cooperation are also discussed at those meetings.

28. In addition, informality characterizes many of the sustainability initiatives at the community level. Accordingly, endogenous development, based on existing traditions, values and leadership within communities, deserves a prominent place as an alternative to development based on initiatives that come from outside of the communities.

Goal 12: responsible consumption and production

29. The aim of Goal 12 is to ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns, which requires systemic change. Indeed, Goal 12 is far-reaching in terms of the economic sectors and actors it involves. National Governments are expected to take the lead on sustainable consumption and production, promote efficient use of natural resources, halve food waste, achieve sound management of chemicals and wastes, reduce waste, promote sustainable public procurement and ensure better information availability. Private companies, especially large and transnational companies, are expected to adopt sustainable practices and integrate sustainability information into their reporting cycles. In his 2017 report on progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (E/2017/66), the Secretary-General expresses concern about the increasing use of natural resources worldwide, in particular in Eastern Asia — a trend contrary to the fulfilment of Goal 12 — and about weak implementation of international agreements on hazardous waste and persistent organic pollutants. The policy targets under Goal 12 are supported by three governance targets, on science and technology, monitoring tools for sustainable tourism and removing market distortions, including by restructuring taxation and phasing out environmentally harmful subsidies.

30. The achievement of Goal 12 requires a strong national framework for sustainable consumption and production that is integrated into national and sectoral plans and sustainable business practices and consumer behaviour, together with international norms on the management of hazardous chemicals and waste. A potential governance failure would be to consider the transition to the circular economy and to corporate social responsibility mainly as an informal network governance challenge, with market mechanisms being able to deal with the more difficult challenges. Such an approach does not take into account the weaknesses of network governance, such as lengthy discussions, lack of rules and lack of democratic accountability. Support from hierarchical (regulatory) governance mechanisms may be needed. It is a rule of thumb that when a governance framework is malfunctioning, adding something from a "neglected" governance style may improve the situation. In the case of Goal 12, a stronger role for Governments and their legislative branches would improve the effectiveness of the existing voluntary approaches. This means that, in terms of policy and institutional coherence, voluntary and informal initiatives and agreements between the Government, the private sector and civil society (e.g., "green deals") should be embedded in a regulatory coherence framework that sets out the rules of engagement between different parties. As regards the role of business, it is becoming clear that businesses that have signed up for corporate social responsibility want to be a part of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Various corporate social responsibility networks, such as the International

Network for Corporate Social Responsibility, which works mainly in African countries, have come to understand that high quality in government and governance is fundamental to reaching their objectives.

Goal 15: life on land

31. Goal 15 contains three governance targets: 15.a, on financial resources to conserve and sustainably use biodiversity and ecosystems; 15.b, on financing sustainable forest management and providing adequate incentives to developing countries to advance such management; and 15.c, on enhancing global support for efforts to combat poaching and trafficking of protected species, including by increasing the capacity of local communities.

32. Goal 15 emphasizes the need to increase finances for the conservation of biodiversity and ecosystems. However, this can be an ineffective strategy, or at least low value for money, when there are, at the same time, undermining and contradictory policies in other areas, such as agriculture, transport and infrastructure, mining and economic development. Policy coherence, supported by institutional coherence, is therefore crucial, and strong leadership at the central level seems to be a precondition.

33. All of the Sustainable Development Goals are interlinked, and coherence is a challenge across all of them. Goal 1, on ending poverty, requires policy and institutional coherence with Goals 8, on growth and jobs; 10 on reducing inequality; and 12, on sustainable consumption and production. Moreover, Goal 1, on ending poverty, requires the prioritization of Goal 6, on water and sanitation, and Goal 7, on energy.

IV. Approaches for promoting policy and institutional coherence for the Sustainable Development Goals

34. The table below gives an overview of nine types of intervention to improve coherence, with a selection of examples. The nine interventions are described in more detail in the paragraphs below.

Types of intervention for the promotion of policy and institutional coherence for the Sustainable Development Goals: examples of successful practice

Type of intervention	*Examples of good practice in the promotion of policy (P) and institutional (I) coherence*
Interventions inspired by hierarchical governance	
Coordination: structured cooperation guided by principles/rules	Structured involvement of parliament (Argentina, Ethiopia, Germany, India, Trinidad and Tobago) (I)
	High-level coordination arrangements in the government (I)
	National strategy for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (many countries) (P)
	Voluntary national reviews on the Sustainable Development Goals (P)

Type of intervention	*Examples of good practice in the promotion of policy (P) and institutional (I) coherence*
Integration: taking into account another policy or merging policies or institutions	Green public procurement policy (integration environment and the economy) (Netherlands and European Commission) (P)
Alignment: mutual adaptation of policies/ institutions, through formal or informal collaboration	Introduction of policy clusters across departments and with non-governmental actors (Cabo Verde) (P and I)
	Periodic meetings of mayors of a metropolitan city and surrounding communities (South Africa) (P)
Multi-level governance: structured collaboration between administrative layers	Mainstreaming the Sustainable Development Goals at the subnational level (Denmark, Maldives, Nepal and Netherlands) (P)
	National sustainable development commission, including all levels of government (Belgium and Brazil) (P and I)
Interventions inspired by network governance	
Compatibility: making contrasting policies/ institutions work together while maintaining their character	"Green deals" between the Government, businesses and civil society (Netherlands) (I)
Reconciliation: resolving conflicts, while achieving better collaboration	Bridging tensions in conflict areas through environmental management (wastewater treatment in Cyprus) (P)
Capacity-building: coaching/training and creating ownership for policy and institutional coherence	Capacity-building activities offered to stakeholders (Indonesia) (P and I)
	Sustainable Development Goals Lab: joint problem solving via co-production (Brazil) (P)
	Strengthening of local public finance management systems (Honduras) (I)
Interventions inspired by market governance	
Public-sector reform: changing the form, structure and/or culture of public sector organizations	Sustainable standards at the national stock exchange (Botswana, Indonesia, Japan and Nigeria) (I)
Empowerment: mandating people to work together across or beyond departments and levels	Interdepartmental project teams or directorates (many countries) (I)
	Interdepartmental "dossier teams" to increase policy coherence (Netherlands) (I)

Coordination

35. Coordination, or structured cooperation guided by principles/rules, is the best known approach to promote coherence. It may be more effective, efficient and faster to create working arrangements between institutions representing policy sectors to coordinate policies and institutions than to start a formal reorganization process to merge them. Reorganizations are typically accompanied by a long period of tension and confusion. A number of countries have created inter-agency/ministerial (high-level) committees to deal with nexus issues and better integrate policymaking. In Bhutan, the Gross National Happiness Commission, which is chaired by the Prime Minister, oversees policy as well as institutional coherence with a view to sustainable development. In other countries, the lead is with various ministries, such as planning (Togo), foreign affairs (China and Egypt), finance (Brazil and Liberia), energy (Maldives) regional development (Ukraine) or environment/sustainable development (Belgium). The synthesis reports of the voluntary national reviews at the high-level political forum on sustainable development[1] provide a rich sample of high-level coordinating structures, which are sometimes anchored in the constitution (Belgium and Bhutan) or an act (Luxembourg). Some countries have a high-level coordinating committee chaired by the Prime Minister (Costa Rica). Some have appointed a high-level coordinator with an oversight role on coherence (Bangladesh and Nigeria).

Integration

36. Another popular approach to achieve coherence is integration. Integration implies taking into account another policy or completely merging policies or institutions. This can be a means to improve coherence and consistency, but it is not the only means by far. Horizontal policy integration is best suited to deliver the coherence requirements of the Sustainable Development Goals at the national, regional or metropolitan strategic planning levels. It consists of mainstreaming a certain aspect into all relevant policies. Policy integration may be needed to tackle complex sustainable development challenges, such as the nexus of water and agriculture or the nexus of energy and transport.

37. Sustainable development is itself an integrated policy concept with economic, social and environmental dimensions. The constitutions of Bhutan, Belgium and other countries call for the integration of sustainable development in all policies. The Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union contains a key article on environmental integration in all sectors, with a view to sustainable development. Institutional integration typically has the connotation of the merging of departments. The merging of environment and infrastructure policy into one ministry, for example, may help solve traffic congestion and air pollution problems, but it is no guarantee of success. The merging of agriculture and environment into one ministry has resulted in more policy coherence in some countries and in undermining environmental policies in others. The integration of the monitoring function of the policy areas, including statistical or data collection, is a potentially powerful approach. This could render correlations between two policies more visible, which is especially relevant when they are counterproductive.

Alignment

38. Policy alignment is a lighter approach, in institutional terms, to promoting coherence. It entails the mutual adaptation of policies/institutions in order to create synergies or prevent them from undermining each other, by creating partnerships or alliances between key governmental actors and between governmental and

non-governmental actors, for example. A precondition for this approach is to overcome fragmentation by breaking down mental silos within the government and in the relations between the government and stakeholders, by organizing informal meetings, building mutual understanding and trust, and thereby creating a platform for fruitful collaboration (mutual gains approach). This could also allow for "ambassadors" or multipliers that are the first groups of stakeholders to be on board.

39. Alignment should not be confused with the wider call for breaking down institutional silos: without institutional silos there is less focus, structure, accountability and transparency. Civil servants ought to be encouraged and mandated to discuss sustainability challenges more openly with other actors, including non-governmental stakeholders. Policy alignment can be an efficient way to introduce simple measures, when there is no need for large interventions, and it can pave the way and create support for larger transitions. Examples of such interventions are knowledge-sharing, experience exchange and championing. New developments, such as blockchain technology, could require or force alignment, leading to a need for capacity-building for new technologies.

40. A good practice example of policy and institutional alignment is the introduction of a cluster-based approach within government and in the relations with the private sector and civil society. A cluster is, in Michael E. Porter's well-known definition, a "geographically proximate group of interconnected companies and associated institutions in a particular field, linked by commonalities and complementarities".[4] Clustering triggers monitoring and reporting about policy impact beyond the existing silo structures. It offers a framework through which policy objectives and incentives for the coordinated area can be aligned and different interests associated with different stakeholders (public and private) can be aggregated. Practical tools duly integrated on a unified platform where all departments/sectors are linked can provide the basis for a higher-quality decision-making process and consequently for policy and institutional coherence anchored in an efficient mechanism of resource allocation (budgeting-programming).

41. From a public policy and institutional standpoint, a cluster-based approach is a powerful tool to identify and manage institutional hurdles to competitiveness and innovation through dialogue among all stakeholders. The cluster-based approach is a good basis for forging partnerships in various areas, such as infrastructure, research, training and regulation, making possible an integrated and coordinated approach. In the European Union, the declared objective of launching an integrated European maritime policy has led to the creation of national clusters within the European Union as a mean to assure policy and institutional coherence. In Cabo Verde, the national medium- to long-term development strategy has been structured in clusters such as the sea, aero-business, information and communications technology and tourism. The aggregation factor in the case of the sea cluster was the country's geostrategic position as an element of competitive and comparative advantage. The sea cluster functioned as a platform, during the planning-budgeting exercise, involving all stakeholders in defining the policies, which contributed to some coherence.

Multilevel governance

42. Multilevel governance, or structured collaboration between administrative layers, is a special form of policy alignment, which is relevant for all of the

[4] Michael E. Porter, "Location, competition and economic development: local clusters in a global economy", *Economic Development Quarterly*, vol. 14, issue 1 (February 2000).

Sustainable Development Goals. For multilevel governance to function well, the responsibilities of subnational authorities need to be clearly defined and their resources and skills need to be in line with their responsibilities. In addition, the quality of the interaction between different levels of government highly influences their effectiveness.

Compatibility

43. Because policy or institutional incoherence is rooted in cultural values or traditions, and in many countries the composition of the population is far from homogenous, ensuring compatibility can be a good approach. Compatibility entails making different/contrasting policies/institutions work together, while keeping their basic differences (e.g., underlying values and objectives) intact. The existing (and growing) cultural pluralism in most countries is often seen as a threat to sustainable development, especially social sustainability. The dominant attitude therefore has been that assimilation of cultural and ethnic views (often euphemized as integration) should be promoted. This ignores the fact that sustainability governance is grounded in cultural values as drivers for social transformation. An alternative approach could be to focus, not on communality or commonly shared values, but on compatibility.[5] The compatibility approach recognizes that there are (in principle, valuable) differences, which may cause tensions and incompatibilities. These differences should not be removed, but rather regulated. This requires that the government safeguard consistently the values of empathy, tolerance and appreciation of pluralism.

Reconciliation

44. The reconciliation approach is related to the accommodation approach. When policy or institutional incoherence is accompanied by long-standing disputes between policy sectors and departments, the reconciliation approach can be helpful. Conflict remediation and training in mutual gains approaches can be applied. Leadership is needed to identify the moment for intervention and to manage those approaches and processes.

Capacity-building

45. There is a huge need for investment in capacity-building to create understanding and ownership for the promotion of policy and institutional coherence. This includes coaching and training in having a more holistic view, in understanding the full scope of the Sustainable Development Goals, in the diplomatic skills and mutual gains negotiation skills needed to overcome conflicts of interest which prevent policy coherence and in modern administrative principles and tools. New kinds of policy instruments need to be developed and tested in addition to the classical rules, taxes, incentives and funding, among other things. Public administration schools and training organizations should take the lead on this. Peer coaching programmes could be developed among Governments from different countries.

Public sector reform

46. Public sector reform, or changing the form, structure and/or culture of policies or institutions, is the most drastic approach. Recent reforms have focused on outsourcing, efficiency gains and productivity gains, as in the private sector. Such reforms often include mergers/integration of departments or outsourcing tasks to

[5] See Arie De Ruijter, "Cultural pluralism and citizenship", *Cultural Dynamics*, vol. 7, issue 2 (1995).

agencies, which can back-fire in terms of promoting coherence. Public sector reforms guided by cost-saving may lead to the dissolution of arrangements established to involve stakeholders and the wider citizenry, which is contrary to the 2030 Agenda principle of leaving no one behind. There is a wide body of academic literature on public sector reform from a comparative perspective from which lessons could be drawn.[6] One of the lessons is that public sector reform for promotion of coherence should focus less on efficiency and more on effectiveness. This includes developing new partnerships and other organizational structures that better connect internal silos and link internal and external actors. Information and communications technology is contributing to this shift.

47. Moreover, public sector reforms should be focused on delivering the Sustainable Development Goals. An efficient, effective and innovative public sector administration does not automatically produce more sustainable results. Implementation of the Goals and the requisite levels of coherence should be part of any reform programme. As such programmes may span several years, consideration should be given to redirecting the ongoing reforms to better deliver on the Goals.

48. A good example of how coherence can be promoted through public sector reform is the introduction in Cabo Verde of a structured planning-budgeting system. The aim of target 17.13 of the Sustainable Development Goals is to enhance global macroeconomic stability, including through policy coordination and policy coherence. The achievement of macroeconomic stability requires policy and institutional coherence on a consistent and long-term basis. Planning-budgeting systems are indispensable frameworks for achieving such a goal, taking into account that such systems, once in place, positively pressure organizations to adopt new procedures and processes (organizational reengineering) for delivery. Coordination, integration, alignment and other types of intervention can be made available within a specific planning-budgeting system to manage the decision-making process for efficient and effective delivery. The achievement of policy and institutional coherence through planning-budgeting systems requires the adoption of the following tools: (a) a definition of a medium- to long-term vision/plan on a participatory basis adopting a cluster approach; (b) a medium-term debt strategy (the sustainable financing strategy that guarantees macroeconomic stability within the vision/plan); (c) a medium-term fiscal framework; (d) a medium-term expenditure framework; (e) a plurennial budget/programming; (f) monitoring and evaluation systems; and (g) a results-based management approach.

Empowerment

49. Empowerment entails mandating people to work together across departments and giving people in the lower ranks of the hierarchy responsibilities and discretionary power to take appropriate decisions. This type of intervention follows the logic that people working close to the policy and institutional challenges are the best placed to assess what should be done in many non-standard situations. These "street-level bureaucrats" include police officers, teachers and health workers. Policy officers implementing the Sustainable Development Goals at the various levels of administration could be given similar discretion.

[6] See, for example, Christopher Pollitt and Geert Bouckaert, *Public Management Reform: A Comparative Analysis: New Public Management, Governance, and the Neo-Weberian State*, 3rd ed. (New York, Oxford University Press, 2011).

V. Underlying principles and practical tools for promoting policy and institutional coherence

50. There is no general blueprint for promoting policy and institutional coherence for the Sustainable Development Goals, as the circumstances of the States Members of the United Nations are too different. Successful practices from elsewhere should be handled with care, as what is successful in one country can be a failure in another. Therefore, it is more accurate to call such successes inspiring examples or good practice, rather than best practices.

51. The various approaches to policy and institutional coherence should be implemented through mechanisms and tools that have proven to work well in a specific country. Tools to promote coherence are no exception to the rule that tools are never value-neutral: they are based on assumptions about the role of government and about when legal or non-legal instruments should be used, among other things. The values and assumptions behind effective instruments and tools often align with the organizational culture of government departments, which often reflects the views, values and assumptions basic to the national culture and tradition. This makes understanding the cultural identity and diversity within and between countries a requisite for effective governance for coherence with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals. At the same time, global governance structures are ever more interlinked, pushed by digital technologies and the data they generate and the fact that the data can flow easily. Therefore, striving for the common goal of policy and institutional coherence requires differentiated governance on the ground.

52. Current insights in administrative effectiveness and sustainability governance, in particular, suggest that the problem of incoherence may not only be caused by the existence of overly hierarchical structures. Hierarchy can be the problem, but it can also be a solution. In non-hierarchical countries, rules may be needed to steer the discussions between stakeholders and the government, just as a centralist government could profit from the knowledge and the acceptance resulting from the involvement of stakeholders. A market-liberal country may promote highly efficient but ineffective mechanisms for coherence, following the motto that "less is more". When, for example, a ministerial national cadastral office with an annual turnover of €300 million was turned into an agency, the politically important interface function between ministry and agency was reduced to one staff member for cost-saving reasons, which created an institutionalized risk of coherence problems.

53. It is possible to cluster the mechanisms and tools for policy and institutional coherence into three groups with more or less similar underlying values, namely, hierarchical, network and market governance tools. Hierarchical governance tools usable for promoting coherence include rules, coordination procedures, monitoring of compliance and provisions to ensure accountability. Examples of network governance tools are establishing or supporting partnerships and informal alliances and organizing peer support and peer review. Market governance entails the use within and by the government of tools typically used by economic operators. These tools include: efficiency measures to eliminate red tape hindering coherence; the empowerment of policymakers; allowing better cooperation; creating agencies; privatization; financial incentives or taxation; and public procurement.

54. The promotion of coherence requires having all of these tools or mechanisms available in one "toolbox" and using them in ways that are compatible with national/organizational cultures and are, at the same time, as innovative as possible. This can be challenging when one specific governance style is predominant in a country or

administrative organization; the skills to operate the other tool families may need to be developed.

55. Tools for coherence may need to be applied in combination. A partnership approach across policy sectors may require a formal agreement or rules. Keeping a legal obligation or reorganization as a last — but visible — resort may motivate relevant actors to work together on a voluntary basis. Combining governance tools into a dynamic framework requires thinking from multiple perspectives. This "metagovernance" (governance of governance) approach has emerged as a successful model to reduce the number and mitigate the impact of governance failures.[7]

56. In addition to being aware about all the available tools, responsible administrative leaders need to have open minds and clear mandates to select and combine tools from different governance styles into an operational governance framework for policy coherence and appropriate institutional arrangements.

57. In the future, there will be better ways to follow the real-time impact of policy decisions and flexibly adjust them. One example of this kind of adjustment that has already emerged is the redirection or restriction of traffic when pollution levels are too high. Policy simulation tools will allow policymakers to change certain parameters in their policy toolbox mix and then see what the impact may be. What could be the impact, for example, of a 1 per cent tax increase?

58. More specifically, it could be worthwhile to consider using an impact assessment tool to determine the potential benefits and costs of measures aimed at improving policy or institutional coherence. Currently, legislation and policies undergo such (regulatory or other) impact assessments, but for measures aimed at the achievement of coherence this is still the exception, despite the fact that the societal and other costs of failed attempts to promote coherence can be huge.

59. The promotion of policy and institutional coherence requires the involvement of all stakeholders: the government, public administration entities, universities and research entities, the private sector, civil society organizations and international partners, among others. By adopting institutional arrangements for policy coherence, such as the aforementioned cluster-based approach within a planning-budgeting system, policy areas can be created, in which, through a common denominator, all stakeholders' visions and interests can be integrated or aligned. All stakeholders would have access to a platform dedicated to dialogue and the identification of innovative and disruptive solutions. This, however, requires a strong information system. In the past five years, information systems have been challenged with the big data concept. Big data is already a reality in the developed world. Societies have become information societies in the sense that billions of bytes are produced and captured by different platforms on a daily basis. The challenge is to create information systems that capture this information for the general good. For example, in the case of Africa, big data is providing the opportunity to leap-frog some of the intermediate development phases by providing farmers with greater access to timely, cost effective and personally relevant information on best practices, markets and prices.

60. The promotion of coherence is a particular challenge for so-called fragile States. Fragile States face problems in a wide range of domains, such as physical security, legitimate political institutions, sound economic management and the delivery of social services. Policy coherence for the Sustainable Development Goals in such

[7] See Louis Meuleman, *Public Management and the Metagoverance of Hierarchies, Networks and Markets* (Heidelberg, Germany, Physica-Verlag, 2008).

countries is linked to challenges in the areas of security, crime and the legitimacy of government interventions. Network governance tools for coherence will be difficult to apply in such States. According to the 2017 ranking of the think tank The Fund for Peace, only 54 (29 per cent) of the 178 States that are currently being monitored can be considered very sustainable, sustainable or stable.[8] According to the Fund, approximately 70 per cent of the countries monitored fell under the categories of "warning" and "very high alert" with respect to fragility. Specific arrangements may need to be considered, such as twinning projects between countries or mobilizing support from private sector and civil society organizations that are pursuing corporate social responsibility.

61. What has not shown to be the best way to achieve long-lasting change is the outsourcing of policy and institutional innovation. Outsourcing prevents internal learning and the creation of ownership. The traditional call for external (consultancy) support to prepare and propose strategic innovation should be replaced, where possible, by coaching on the job. That way, the implementation of interventions to promote coherence will contribute directly to capacity-building. Learning from difficult tasks should be in-house, while less complicated work could be outsourced.

62. For the small island developing States, in many cases, the scale is too small to develop or hire the necessary expertise to introduce tools to promote coherence. Measures to create economies of scale through close collaboration, with the support of information and communications technology, may be needed. The small island developing States are among the most vulnerable developing countries, and their vulnerabilities are unique and particular. Smallness can be an advantage for policy coherence; greater personal contact, for example, can facilitate closer communication among public servants in different ministries.

63. Finally, in a number of countries, political administrations change frequently, with or without elections. The specific challenge in these situations is the absence of long-term consistency. Where it is the tradition that many civil servants are replaced after a new government comes into power, it is difficult to maintain the quality of the administration at a high and constant level. These changing situations happen in both developed and developing States, particularly where the democratic system is of the majoritarian type found in many countries. As regards both policy coherence and institutional coherence for the Sustainable Development Goals, this is an unfortunate systemic issue, for which, however, solutions have emerged. For example, investing in the whole of parliament may be a good approach to prevent disruption after a change of government, as has been shown in Jamaica. In Trinidad and Tobago, the Parliament has established a Joint Select Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development and has committed to help implement the Sustainable Development Goals through all acts of legislation, including budget allocation.

64. Any work programme for promoting policy and institutional coherence should: (a) be light, clear and not overly complicated; (b) be based on an analysis of how to combine several approaches, principles and tools for policy and institutional coherence which are synergetic and do not undermine each other, in a particular case (country, subnational area, city); and (c) include a mechanism for learning from successful and unsuccessful practices in both different and similar countries.

65. The promotion of coherence will not work without learning from each other. Implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals by 2030 is so urgent and demanding that we should try to avoid re-inventing the wheel. It is therefore recommendable to redirect existing peer review, peer learning and twinning projects

[8] The Fund for Peace. Fragile States index. Available from http://fundforpeace.org/fsi/data/.

and programmes related to the Goals in order to dedicate a substantial percentage (for example, 10 per cent) of the resources to learning and exchange for the promotion of coherence. Peer-to-peer learning is a cost-effective example of such learning tools. The introduction of a global peer-to-peer learning tool for the promotion of coherence should be considered. The tool would finance the travel and accommodation costs of experts from one country who are willing to advise another country, at its request, through expert missions, study visits or small workshops. The peer-to-peer tools established by the European Commission for implementation of European Union environmental and regional development policies represent a good practice, including on promoting coherence.

66. In addition, it would be recommendable to establish a global network of national coherence promotion coordinators to enable discussion and exchange information on successes and failures. Several countries (such as Nigeria) have already appointed coordinators for the Sustainable Development Goals at a high level, with coherence as part of their remit.

VI. Recommendations

67. The following 10 recommendations are proposed to promote policy and institutional coherence for the Sustainable Development Goals. They focus on national Governments, but are also relevant at other levels. The implementation of the recommendations requires sponsors, early adopters and supporters among United Nations bodies and Member States, as well as other stakeholders.

Principles for better coherence

1. **Promote policy coherence always in synergy with the promotion of institutional coherence.** To do this, strategies and concrete tools are needed that both cover challenges and prevent contradictions. Public sector organizations should have these tools within reach.

2. **Adapt measures for the promotion of coherence to the specificities of Sustainable Development Goals and to the context in which they will be implemented.** The principle of "'common but differentiated governance"[9] fully applies to policy and institutional coherence: coherent and differentiated practices should go hand in hand.

3. **Involve the private sector, civil society and the academic world in concrete action for the promotion of coherence.** This will bring in indispensable partners with essential knowledge about what works where and when. This is all the more important because private-private (business and civil society) partnerships across sectors are emerging.

Planning, design and implementation for better coherence

4. **Develop national work programmes for the promotion of coherence.** Such work programmes could contain objectives and tools for the short, medium and long term and be informed by an assessment of how to combine various strategies and tools for policy and institutional coherence which are synergetic and do not undermine each other. The work programmes should include a

[9] Meuleman, L., and Niestroy, I. (2015). Common But Differentiated Governance: A Metagovernance Approach to Make the SDGs Work. *Sustainability* 12295–12321.

mechanism to monitor their effectiveness and should not create additional administrative burden.

5. **Combine multiple approaches to the promotion of coherence.** There are various ways to promote coherence. There are nine approaches mentioned in the present paper: coordination, integration, alignment, multilevel governance, compatibility, reconciliation, capacity-building, reform and empowerment. They should be considered in a synergistic way.

6. **Combine complementary coherence tools.** Select and combine coherence-promotion tools from hierarchical (regulatory), network (collaboration) and market (efficiency/incentives) governance. The three families of tools express different and sometimes contrasting, but in principle complementary, cultural values, traditions and assumptions. The promotion of policy coherence and related institutional arrangements requires having all these tools available and the skills to use them.

7. **Redirect public sector reform to deliver on the Sustainable Development Goals.** Reforms are currently mostly directed at improving efficiency and effectiveness in general; they need to be redirected to promote policy and institutional coherence to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.

Learning for better coherence

8. **Introduce a global peer-to-peer learning tool for the promotion of coherence.** This would finance the travel and accommodation costs of experts from one country who are willing to advise another country, at its request, through expert missions, study visits or small workshops. It could be based on existing peer-to-peer tools.

9. **Establish a global network (community of practice) of national coherence promotion coordinators.** This would accelerate mutual learning and the exchange of good practices and failed attempts, among those who are responsible at the national level for progress on coherence. Peer coaching programmes could be developed among Governments from different countries. Coaching, also by professional advisors and consultants, could become the new standard to accelerate policy and institutional coherence. Existing networks could be involved, such as the Centre of Excellence for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States.

10. **Training is the basis: national public administration schools should integrate the promotion of coherence for the Sustainable Development Goals as a priority in their curricula.** Other schools and universities should join this effort.